**Pastor’s Musings Dec 21, 2020**

John 3:16: *For God expressed His love for the world in this way: He gave his only Son so that whoever believes in Him will not face everlasting destruction but will have everlasting life.* (The Voice)

This verse is the culmination of why Jesus came as a baby, grew up as a humble servant, was then used as the ultimate sacrifice for our sins, rose from the dead to defeat death, and is now sitting at the right hand of the Father. It’s all because we are so loved. God chose this as a way to show us how much He loves us.

How are we to respond to this love? We give God our yes. We say yes to having a relationship with Jesus. We say yes to the forgiveness that was so graciously and lovingly offered to us. We say yes to the Holy Spirit, which the Father promised would come. We say yes to living in that power of the Holy Spirit, with love as being one of the fruit that grows as we live life in the Spirit. We say yes to the coming King. We say yes to His love offered freely for us!

**God's love for the world**

The psalmist sings God's love song for the world to hear as God's unbreakable covenant is proclaimed. God's steadfast love will be recklessly poured out on God's beloved. Psalm 89 is filled with action verbs, reflecting a God in motion, unstoppable because of the power of this love. God will set a crown, anoint with oil, always remain and strengthen. There will inevitably be obstacles to love, but God is prepared. God will not allow the enemy to outwit or humble the beloved. Any foes will be crushed and haters will be struck down. This is not a fairy tale, sticky-sweet, unrealistic love; this is a relationship that will be tested by daunting obstacles but which will continue because of the faithfulness of God.

In this enduring covenant, God promises "my faithfulness and steadfast love." The beloved will respond to this lasting relationship with the heartfelt cry, "You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation!" (v.26). This is what God would do for love -- God enters into this relationship wholeheartedly and without reservation. God declares unending love without abandon.

**Christmas love**

That kind of love demands courage. As we celebrate Advent and Christmas, we're fully aware of where God's love is leading us. The love might begin in the softly starlit manger, but it inevitably will lead to the harsh noonday sun reflecting on the Cross. God knows this, of course, but does not shy away from the pain that is coming. God's extravagant love is demonstrated in God's willingness to give sacrificially. God bestows the most precious gift, God's Son, knowing that this offering will not be appreciated, honored, or at times, even recognized. Yet God also sings, "can't regret what I did for love," as this love which is freely given is leading God's beloved children home.

The price is great, almost beyond measure. The gift of Christmas is that God looks at the cost without blinking. God does indeed care enough to send the very best. The best is the gift of Christ, this bundle of love wrapped in cloths hastily assembled in the lowliest of birth places. It's the gift –

- that makes the angels sing,

- the shepherds run to attention,

- the magi travel to worship and adore

- and it's the gift that continues to bless us even today.

God's love is an "always" love; the psalmist assures us that God is steadfast in devotion and faithfulness. This covenant is reminiscent of a marriage vow; the divine promise is to be faithful until parted by death and even beyond. This is not a conditional love. It is not a careful love. There is no prenuptial agreement here. This is dive in, take no prisoners, head-over-heels, no-holds-barred kind of love. God is willing to give Jesus the beloved on behalf of this fickle, unappreciative world. This is what God would do for love: God will offer that which is most precious.

The ferocity and strength of this love should bring to mind the pledge, spoken or unspoken, of parents across the globe when they catch the first glimpse of their newborn child. In that instant an unbreakable bond is formed with the understood vow, "I will always be there for you." It is fierceness like that of a tigress or a mother bear -- I will fight for you, if necessary. I will defend you with my blood, with my life and with all of my spirit.

Although this love will seek to protect and promises never to abandon, it does not and cannot promise an absence of danger, loss or stress. There will be foes, enemies and wicked ones who want to do harm. God promises that the love of God will never end; the evil that exists cannot prevail. It's not a gilded path free of pain or sorrow, but rather the accompaniment of faithfulness along a precarious journey; it's the promise of a love that is steadfast, strong and true. We can count on this love, no matter what comes.

As cute and fanciful as the imaginative marriage proposals might be, it's this mature, lasting love that every couple really needs. Even if they're unaware of it at the blissful beginning, couples will need a love that is tough, enduring and prepared to meet obstacles head-on. They need a love that offers the armor and protection that is needed to see them through the ups and downs that await them down the road.

That love arrives in a deceptively simple package, laid in a manger, approachable by all who wish to encounter him. This gift and promise of God is for everyone. One could mistakenly believe that Advent is about a squishy, adorable baby who mysteriously appears annually at this time of year. Yet this child who is born to us, this Son who is given is the Savior of the world. The Advent season asks us to prepare our hearts to receive a love that is humbling in its passion and amazing in its depth.

God's love does not fade, weaken or diminish. It's offered to us fresh and new every day. What are we asked to do for this love?

Simply say "yes" to God who is always willing to give us more.

LET US PRAY: Father, thank You for loving us. Thank you for offering Your beautiful Son, King Jesus, so that we may live everlasting life. We respond to Your love for us with our yes to have a relationship with Jesus, receive Your forgiveness and grace, and yes to receiving the infilling and indwelling of the Holy Spirit so that we can overflow with Your love. Thank you, Father, in Jesus’ Name, Amen.